



TO THE

RURAL DISTRICT COUNCIL

OF

EATON BRAY.

MR. CHAIRMAN AND GENTLEMEN—

I have the pleasure to lay my Annual Report for year 1903 before your notice.

The year has been, as to weather, an unprecedented one for rain, surpassing the noted years 1860, 1879 and 1894; result of so much rain and cold was the destruction of the fruit crop, which, not in living memory, fell to so low a condition of scarcity. The rain continuing through the autumn, prevented the ploughing to a great extent and spoilt a good deal that was done, thus imperilling and jeopardising agricultural prospects considerably, and indirectly impeding the earnings of the population.

The rain, however, would fill the springs which had become very low, several wells having failed in our District, notably at Billington and Wingfield and Heath, after several years of drought which ended with 1902 year. In a very marked degree, however, the rain would have a beneficial influence by purifying the air of dust and microbes; also freshening up the rivers and streams, in fact, nature was having a good wash; and further by filling the springs, thus correcting what would come to happen—a scarcity of the most necessary commodity—water. The rainy summer would be, and actually was, a cool summer; and somehow, such a summer together with a mild winter, makes considerably for the Public Health. I read in the Public Press that the year 1903 was most noticeable for its very low mortality—the lowest on record.

The births have been 100, somewhat more than last year, only in three previous years of the Decennial have the births reached three figures. The 100 births giving an average of 24·33 on the population of 4,041. I have not reckoned on any probable increase of the population, as I fear that the reverse of increase is the more probable. Somehow, our village population is not very induced to get larger, the young men being so inclined to go away to the towns, as they say, to get a living—agricultural employment not seeming to be brisk, or as some think, they go to the towns to get away from the dullness of the country; the greater education of the present day rendering them more capable of enjoying those intellectual pleasures that are accessible in towns; but, at all events, much less so in villages. There are, however, more conveniences than formerly in rural districts, by way of postal and telegraph and more railway, and now the motor-car which render these localities more convenient for town dwellers to come to, escaping the crowding of the towns.

Deaths in the year have been forty-three, including three in the Union House of Leighton, of persons coming from the District, giving an average of 10·48, comparing well with 51 in 1902, with its average of 12·19.

There was one death from Diphtheria at Tilsworth, in a child of eighteen months ; four cases of Phthisis, and two of kindred Tubercular Affections, three cases of Cancer, six of Bronchitis, two from Pneumonia, one of Cirrhosis of Liver, nine deaths from Heart Disease, one from a carriage accident, and fourteen from all other causes, thus making up the forty-three.

Of the strictly Infectious Diseases it will be noticed that there was only one death—that of Diphtheria in a baby—it seemed to happen very suddenly, the Doctor notifying it at his first visit and at his second visit found that death had occurred—in one of those old rambling, worn-out houses, built before hygienic conditions and requirements were dreamt of, the ground rising behind the house, the great rain of the last season flowing down, washing out contents of privy built close to house, and carrying diluted contents of same round side of and flowing into courtyard of dwelling, a most insanitary state of things ; and with the dampness—a very contributory cause of Diphtheria—we do not wonder at the outbreak. I had the house disinfected with sulphurous acid gas, myself directing the new Sanitary Inspector and superintending the operation, and instructing Mr. Broom to acquaint the owner of the property with a view to structural amendment. On again visiting the place lately, I found nothing had been done by the owner, but the tenant had made a trench by the side of privy that would very conveniently carry the water from the higher ground *past* the privy, thus escaping the diluting of the faecal contents.

There were four children at time of the Diphtheria, which, proving fatal, lessened the number to three, and there has been a birth since, thus restoring the number to four; of course, I forbade the other children from School for a time, but there has been, I am happy to say, no further cases of Diphtheria in that locality.

The condition of many of our village dwellings, more noticeable in some parts of our District than others perhaps, furnishes abundant proof of the selfish greed of owners of property, no matter what places the people have to live in, so long as the owners get their rent; the Housing of the Working Classes Act was an abundant necessity, and will and must come more and more into practical application.

The case of Erysipelas was in an adult person of thirty years of age, a wife and mother, who had never had an attack before and who made a complete recovery. No particular cause was traceable. Was it the general unhygienic condition of Eaton Bray with its contaminated water that would lead up to ill health generally, and to Infectious Disease in particular?

A case of Scarlet Fever in a child of four years of age at Standbridge, of an only child, so there were no more to take it, or be sent to School. It was in a small farm-house, which of course, was an isolated building; I examined the premises carefully, but found nothing to complain of, parents alive to hygienic principles as to cleanliness, using carbolic soap and employing ventilation. Enquiring as to infection through letters, the woman said they did not have any, but it is difficult to understand how people can have none; and, if letters, how difficult to trace out where such (or the

note paper on which such were written) came from, that is, as to their environment. The second case of Erysipelas was an adult of fifty years, also at Standbridge, but a different part to where the Scarlatina case happened—an isolated case, not traceable to anything in particular.

The water-supply in all these villages is from wells, and as the population is small and very scattered, and the district agricultural, with the depression that has hung over that industry for many years, it would seem at present the most practicable supply. We are doing all we can to keep the wells clean, to protect them from contamination, as from the washing by rain of the manure, etc., from higher ground into the well itself—this has our constant and earnest attention. As to the privies, we are doing our best to introduce the pail system, thus entailing frequent emptying.

We had the misfortune to lose our Sanitary Inspector (Mr. Brown) in April, and Mr. Broom was appointed in May, who visits his district frequently, making 115 visits to end of year, has issued 52 notices to tenants to abate nuisances, which in all cases have been complied with. With him I visited all the bake-houses in the District to the number of thirteen, and found the majority fairly well appointed as to the formation, cleanliness, and sufficient cubic feet, in proportion to the persons employed there. Two we criticised—one an underground bakehouse at Heath, but otherwise well kept, and had been in operation for many years; the other was at Billington, and notoriously bad, not sufficient space to do things properly or keep the flour decently. Under our advice the baker consented to build a proper place at Little Billington, and plans for which have been approved by our District Council. He was the more

willing to do this, as we duly promised under no circumstances to issue a license for the old place to another baker, as even if new buildings were put up there is not enough space to do business properly.

The District Council is at work over the new sewerage plans for Eaton Bray. The Inspector, is coming on the 29th March, to approve the loan for £3,250, necessary to complete. The land has been acquired, arrangements having been duly made with the land-owner. The outfall to be at a place called Clump Bushes. The Engineer thinks he can get enough flushing of sewers from existing streams.

But it is much to be wished that a system of waterworks could have been in operation as well. It is some years since a loan of £2,000 was approved for waterworks, but somehow it was never begun. If it is anything a population requires more than another for health preservation, it is pure water; any primitive existing supply being so easily contaminated by carelessness, ignorance, habits of the people, and parsimonious greed of owners of property.

The Zymotic Rate was only .24, very low; the Phthisis rate was .96.

Deaths under one year old was 6—one more than last year; averaging 1.46.

I will now conclude this Report, which I think will fairly represent the sanitary history of our District for 1903, earnestly believing that the improved system of Local Government, initiated a few years ago, will, especially in the case of District Councils,

eventuate in a considerable betterment in the health conditions of our village populations. The towns, we know, have had their priority in sanitary improvement in the years ago, indeed, crowded town populations could not have existed without them, as we know by the history of the Great Plague in London in 1665. The villages must have their turn now.

I beg to remain,

Gentlemen,

Your obedient Servant,

J. A. HEDGES,

MEDICAL OFFICER OF HEALTH.

